



News Release

Communications New Brunswick

New Brunswick Human Rights Commission

Statement / Human Rights Day (07/09/13)

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FREDERICTON (CNB) - The following message was released by New Brunswick Human Rights Commission Chair Gordon L. Porter:

"On Sept. 15, New Brunswick Human Rights Day, we celebrate the 40th anniversary of the coming into effect of the New Brunswick Human Rights Act, and with it the birth of the New Brunswick Human Rights Commission.

"In 1967, New Brunswick became only the second province in Canada to establish a Human Rights Commission. While we had already adopted laws in the 1950s that prohibited a few types of discrimination in employment and public accommodations, services and facilities, they had been ineffective because there was no agency responsible for promoting equality and informing people of their rights and responsibilities under the legislation. That is why the Human Rights Commission was created.

"The Human Rights Act was one of the elements of then-Premier Louis J. Robichaud's Equal Opportunity Program, which also included the establishment of the Ombudsman in 1967 and several major government reforms.

"The move to establish the Human Rights Commission did not happen in isolation. It was no doubt influenced by the black civil rights movement in the United States, the atrocities of the Second World War, the labour movement, the development of international human rights law (in which New Brunswicker John. P. Humphrey played a major role) and the unfortunate fact that racial discrimination and anti-semitism were very much a reality in New Brunswick.

"For example, it may come as a surprise to many New Brunswickers today that, until the early 1950s, the largest hotel in Saint John, the Admiral Beatty, barred blacks, even great stars like Ella Fitzgerald and Louis Armstrong, from entering through the front door. However, Lena O'Ree, a black woman from Saint John who can be compared to Rosa Parks, insisted on using the front door, and her persistence eventually led the hotel to change its policy.

"Given this historical backdrop, the Human Rights Act initially focused only on discrimination based on race, colour, national origin, nationality, place of origin, creed and religion. Sex was not added until 1971. Until then, sex discrimination was generally legal in New Brunswick. Today, the Human Rights Act prohibits discrimination based on 14 grounds.

"People who would like to find out more about the circumstances that led to the creation of the Human Rights Commission might be interested in attending a one-day forum that the Human Rights Commission is co- sponsoring on Monday, Sept. 24 in Fredericton. As well as looking at the origin of the Commission, the forum will some current and future issues, including mandatory retirement, the rights of persons with disabilities and the rights of indigenous peoples.

"In addition, the New Brunswick Human Rights Award will be presented during the forum to Senate Speaker Noël Kinsella, who wrote the report that led to the adoption of the Human Rights Act, and who chaired the commission during its first 22 years. More information about the forum is available online or by phoning 1-888-471-2233.

"Human rights touch everyone, and we are all indebted to those who have worked to achieve the human rights that we enjoy today. As we approach the 40th anniversary of the Human Rights Act, I would like to acknowledge and thank the countless individuals and groups who have advanced human rights in our province.

"I would also like to remind New Brunswickers that our work is not done, and human rights continue to be an important issue in our province. As we seek to attract and retain new immigrants, it is more important than ever that New Brunswick be a place where all can feel welcome and can participate fully in our society."

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